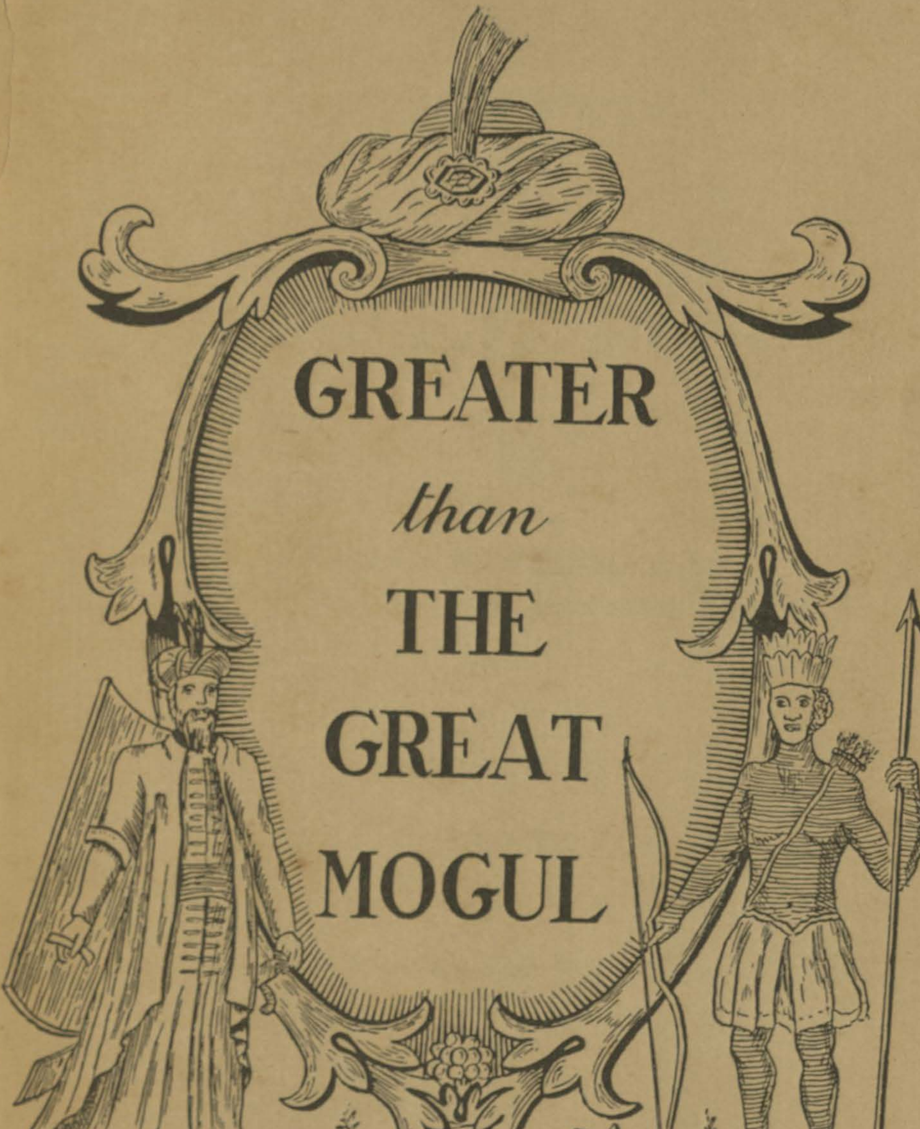
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GREAT

MAGHUL

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GREATER *than* THE GREAT MOGUL



GREATER

THAN

THE GREAT MOGUL

BY

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Author of "THE RUINED TEMPLE" & "BLOOD ON THE MOUNTAIN"

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BY

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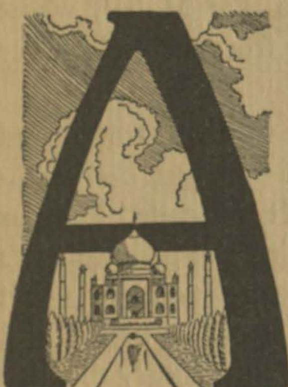
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LIGHT OF THE EAST SERIES

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CONTENTS



AKBAR, the Great Mogul—what a name to conjure with! Said to have descended from that fierce Mongol, Genghis Khan, and with the blood of the mighty Tamerlane coursing in his veins, this most illustrious of the Mogul Monarchs proved himself worthy of such warlike lineage. Utterly fearless and indomitable, and lusting for power, with his conquering sword he carved out for himself an empire that embraced the whole of Afghanistan and northern India. Moreover, with a sheer genius for government, such as few men have ever possessed, he so firmly welded together the heterogeneous elements of his kingdom, that the incompetence and misrule of later emperors succeeded in undermining it only two centuries after he had bequeathed it to the Mogul Dynasty.

Thus, by 1574 the Great Mogul, then but thirty-two years of age, could already survey with smiling complacency the vast empire he had built. Up to now he had kept his brilliant court in the old city of Agra, situated on the river Jumna in northern India. If ancient chronicles be true, Agra was already an important Hindu stronghold hundreds of years before the Magi discovered the new-born Raja in Bethlehem. It took on real historical stature however in 1558 A. D., when Akbar made it the capital of his newly founded Mogul Empire. And today this old city is still renowned as the home of the world-famous Taj Mahal, whose unrivalled beauty attracts tourists from the ends of the earth.

But in this year, 1574, the Great Mogul transferred his capital to a new citadel, which had just been completed twenty miles from Agra. It was called Fatepur Sikri, the 'City of Victory'. Behind the massive walls of this impregnable stronghold, he now held his court in perfect security, enjoyed his elephant fights, and indulged in every excess of pomp and luxury that his wild fancy might dictate. A contemporary traveller who visited the court recorded in his quaint old English that "the King hath in Agra and Fatepur as they doe credibly report 1,000 elephants, thirty thousand horses, 1,400 tame deere, 800 concubines ; such store of Ounces (snow leopards from the Himalayas), Tigers, Buffles, Cocks and Haukes, that is very strange to see."

WHILE the Great Mogul was thus revelling in his spoils and achievements, and dreaming dreams of still further conquests, in far off Europe a young Jesuit Scholastic, only by eight years Akbar's junior, was likewise dreaming of conquest. And like Akbar he too could boast of noble lineage and military traditions : for he was Rudolph Acquaviva, son of Don John, ninth Duke of Atri, who had fought with distinction against the Turk and shared in the glorious victory of Lepanto.

But young Acquaviva set little store on his noble birth. Indeed, he recoiled whenever it was referred to. For him one thing alone mattered, and that was sanctity. Already of his novitiate days it is recorded that

" Rudolph was noted for his holiness, especially for his charity, humility, and obedience ; and he often expressed himself in such a way about these virtues, that it seemed impossible that he should have his knowledge by mere natural means."

Moreover, he was endowed with intellectual gifts of a very high order, which gave promise of great things for the future. He might easily, for instance, have aspired to a chair of philosophy or theology in one of the great universities of Europe. His ambitions, however, were aimed in quite a different direction.



PERHAPS second only to his ardent affection for our Blessed Lady came Rudolph's very special devotion to the great apostle of the Indies. And this sprang from his own intense desire to be a missionary,—a desire which he had likely been cherishing from that joyous day, twelve years earlier, when after a bitter struggle, he had finally gained his father's consent to enter the Society of Jesus. And it was Xavier to whom he had been praying so earnestly all these years that he might be permitted to follow in his footsteps.

Conquest of souls ! This was Acquaviva's dream. And a message now arrived at the Roman College where he was residing, which gave him reason to hope that this dream might finally come true. For the mes-

sage was from Father Sylva, Procurator of the missions of the East. He was on his way back to Rome, and would soon arrive at the college.

Immediately Rudolph's hopes began to soar. He now sought Xavier's intercession more fervently than ever, and increased his fasts and penances. And when the day for Father de Sylva's arrival came round, we are told that he went out to the city gates to meet him. On seeing him approaching, "Rudolph ran up to him, and throwing himself at his travelstained feet, tenderly kissed them, declaring he would not rise without a promise on his part that he would take him back to India."

THOUGH the young Scholastic was utterly unknown to him, Father de Sylva was so impressed by that display of enthusiasm, that he complied with the request, and indeed lost no time in placing Acquaviva's petition before his superiors.

But serious difficulties stood in the way. In the first place, Rudolph's splendid talents seemed naturally better fitted for the lecture hall. Moreover, he was delicate in health. And a voyage to India in those days meant six months of hardship at sea. Too, even though he should successfully withstand the rigours of the voyage, there were yet the difficulties of a tropical climate to be taken into account. So in the end it was decided that Rudolph's ambition to be a missionary in India had better remain only a praiseworthy desire ; his health was scarcely equal to so arduous a life.

Well schooled in obedience, Rudolph tried to accept the decision cheerfully . But he certainly had no mind to let it rest at that. On the contrary, he now implored his heavenly patron all the more, and he fortified his prayers with redoubled vigour in fasting and penances. Not satisfied with that, he took his cause to a servant in the college, named Benedict Nursino, who had a reputation for extraordinary holiness of life. He begged Benedict to storm Heaven that his desire to go to India might be granted.

Benedict did storm Heaven, and he got a truly marvellous answer from the Queen of Martyrs. He returned with haste to Rudolph, and exclaimed: "O fortunate young man! Your health will become strong enough to enable you to make the voyage across the seas, and to shed your blood for the faith. The Queen of Heaven has made this known to me."



ABOUT the end of 1577, Father de Sylva, with thirteen new recruits for the Indies, set out for Lisbon in Portugal, whence they were to embark. And one of those recruits was Rudolph Acquaviva. Benedict's prophecy was being verified.

Shortly after his arrival in Lisbon, Rudolph wrote to his superior: "As you ordered me when leaving Rome, and as my duty bids me, I hasten to tell you how I am. By God's mercy I feel pretty well, and have plenty of strength to serve Him in India. And I doubt not that our Lord has been my helper in this, thanks to your prayers; for everyone is astonished that I am very much better now than when in Rome. From these and numberless other favours which God has shown me on this journey, it seems to me clear that I am destined for India by a very striking Providence."

And indeed he was. For that prophecy of Benedict Nursino was to be verified in full.

The little band of missionaries had to wait four months for the Portuguese East Indian fleet to sail. This time was employed by Acquaviva in preparing for his ordination to the priesthood. And on March 12, 1578, the feast of Saint Gregory the Great, he had the supreme joy of offering his first Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Two days later, by a felicitous coincidence, it was also the 'Saint Gregory' on which he embarked.

The voyage, though painfully tedious, was nevertheless an unusually prosperous one. Favoured with fine weather, the little fleet rounded the Cape of Good Hope on June 20th, and on September 13th, almost six months to the day from the date of embarking, Rudolph and his companions landed at Goa. This was at that time the Capital of Portuguese India, where just thirty-six years before, Xavier had likewise reached the goal of his desires.



THE glory that was Goa long ago has vanished utterly. For the old city has long since fallen on evil days. Except for a few churches still in an indifferent state of preservation, one who visits the site today sees only a desolate waste, strewn with ruins, with here and there the crumbling masonry of an old foundation, or the jagged remains of a once beautiful facade rising up out of a jungle of rank vegetation.

But it was far different four hundred years ago. The Goa that met Rudolph's astonished gaze was the sparkling gem of the East, which could vaunt the proud boast : "He who visits Goa need not trouble to see Lisbon." The city as Rudolph saw it is graphically described in the letters of Joao de Sepulveda,

a Portuguese traveller and adventurer, who was one of the crowd that thronged the quay when Xavier stepped ashore. "What a sight is Goa from the river!" he exclaims. "Partly built on level ground, partly on hills like our own Lisbon, it is a sea of red roofs glittering in the sun, emerging from tufts of vegetation and stately palms. Here and there shoots up a tower or spire from some church or cathedral, like a white finger pointing to heaven. The river is brimful of ships and boats of infinite shapes and sizes— caravel, galleys, brigs, etc. You cannot imagine what a cosmopolitan city this is. I have seen men from Tartary and Brao Mogol, queer, squat figures, with mere slits for eyes, and with enormous pigtails, the ends of which they coil and put in their pockets. Besides these there are all sorts of races, white, black, brown,—the tall Arab with his turban, the stately Persian, the Jew with his gaberdine, the Guzaratis, stout but keen businessmen, the ebony-black Kaffirs, and the Malayas.

"The Rua Direita is the nerve-center of the city, and during hot hours the street is one vast canopy of umbrellas. There in the mornings are held public auctions, and much cheating attends them. On both sides it is flanked with gorgeous shops and counting houses. Goldsmiths abound, and the work they turn out is very fine and delicate. There are fine tissues and fabrics sold by Flemish merchants, splendid tapestries from Persia, muslins thin like gauze, coming from Bengal; rich corals brought down by the Arabs; pearls of wondrous size from Pescaria and Taprobana; gold dust from Sofala, and ivory from Socotra; rubies from Pegu, and diamonds from Golkanda; fine silks

and porcelain as delicate as egg-shells from China. Money from all the world is exchanged here, and there are many clever bankers from Lombardy. Close by are sold the small, but wiry and agile horses of Persia and Arabia. Of spices there is abundance; ships keep coming in with the produce of Malabar, Ceylon, Celebes and the Moluccas."



OLD Goa in its golden days could boast of a church or institution of almost every religious order then in existence. There were the Dominicans, the Grey Friars, the Augustinians, the Jesuits, the Friars of Divine Providence, and the Order of Saint John of God. All had their houses and churches, and the Jesuits, in addition to their large Professed House and the Church of Bom Jesu, had the famous College of St. Paul's. And Rudolph's first appointment was to join the teaching staff of St. Paul's. Shortly after his arrival, he had the consolation of participating in the baptism of twenty new converts, and his zeal for souls took on an increased fervour. But those intellectual attainments, which had already gained for him a reputation back in Rome, now

confined him to a class room. He thus spent a year, teaching philosophy and using leisure moments to study the native language and to acquaint himself with the customs of Hinduism.

But then one day in September, 1579, all Goa was astir with excitement as the Portuguese Viceroy, attended by a brilliant cavalcade, escorted an embassy from the Great Mogul into the city. And great was the surprise of the Fathers at the College when the chief envoy, named Abdullah, announced that he had a message from his Sovereign to deliver to the Jesuits. It read :

" To the chief Padre, in the name of the Lord.

Letter of Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar,
King by the hand of God.

Fathers of the College of St. Paul, know that I am very well disposed towards you. I am sending Abdullah, my ambassador, and Domenico Perez, with the request that you will send me two learned Fathers, and the books of the Law, especially the Gospel, that I may know the law and its excellence. For I desire to know it. I beg therefore earnestly that they may come with these envoys, and bring the books of the Law. And the Fathers may be sure that I shall receive them most courteously, and entertain them most handsomely. When I have learnt the Law sufficiently to appreciate its excellence, then they may depart at their pleasure, with an escort, and honoured with abundant rewards. Let them come in perfect security ; I take their defence on myself."

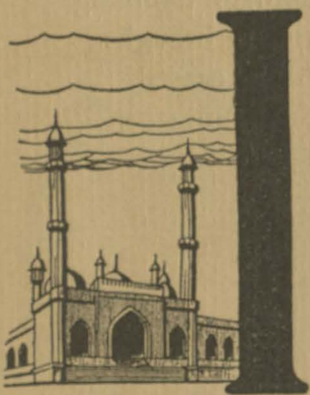
This earnest and very cordial communication took the Fathers completely by surprise. The Great Mogul, a born son of Islam, asking for the Gospel ! Was it credible ? For years they had sought in vain for some means of introducing Christianity into Akbar's Kingdom, and now on his own initiative he not only invites but begs them to come. How had this come about ?



THE Great Mogul's first contact with Christianity dated from an incident which occurred in his dominion of Lower Bengal about three years previous to this unexpected turn of events. Two Jesuit missionaries had been preaching in the Portuguese trading station of Satgaon, near the present site of Calcutta, and learning that some of the Christian merchants were withholding certain just revenues from the Imperial treasury, the Fathers took the offenders to task and imposed restitution, with the result that the revenues were appreciably increased.

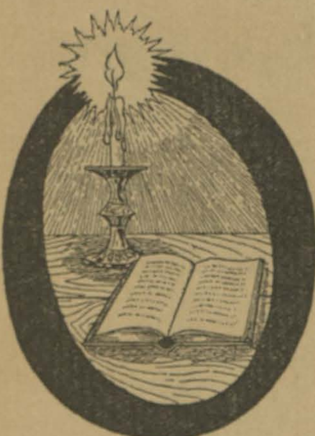
Akbar heard of this, and at once conceived a high admiration for a religion which so vigorously and effectively upheld the principles of honesty. The

Vicar-General of Bengal at that time was Father Giles Pereira. Akbar promptly summoned him to Fatepur Sikri that he might become more acquainted with the teaching of Christianity. Father Pereira was respectfully and cordially received. But the Vicar-General, though every inch a priest, was scarcely a scholar, and he was now made to face such a barrage of questions and difficulties, levelled at him by both the Emperor and his Mullahs (Muslim priests), that he found his learning overtaxed. He accordingly informed the King of the Jesuits at Goa, and suggested that he summon them.



IT may make for a better understanding of later events to note here that the Great Mogul, whose cardinal policy of compromise and broad toleration was so successful in welding together the widely differing elements of his extensive empire, was prone to pursue this same policy in the matter of religion. Though a Mohammedan by birth, he took the Koran lightly. The orthodox Muslim, for instance, religiously shuns intoxicating drink, but Akbar's son, Jahangir, wrote in his memoirs: "After my birth they gave me the name of Sultan Salim, but I never heard my father, *whether in his cups* or in his sober moments, call me Mohammed Salim or Sultan Salim, but always Shaikhu Baba." The missionaries were to learn later that Jahangir's father was rather frequently 'in his cups'.

In no wise a deep scholar himself—indeed he had scarcely any formal education whatever—Akbar was nevertheless very fond of listening to theological and philosophical discussions. This led him to erect a so-called 'House of Worship', which was in reality but a place for holding debates. At first only the Mullahs representing the various sects of Mohammedanism were called in to expound their doctrines before the King. Later on, however, Hindus, Parsees, and representatives of every sort of religion were admitted. Whether or not this indiscriminate dabbling into various religious systems brought it about, the fact is that Akbar ceased to be an orthodox Mohammedan, and began to dream of founding a religion of his own.



ON receiving the Great Mogul's invitation, excitement ran high among the Fathers at Goa, and they now began to entertain hopes which they scarcely dared dream of before. If only they could win over the Emperor to the Faith, what a harvest of souls might they not reap among the sub-ects of his vast empire ! The undertaking would indeed be perilous, for it meant going into a very stronghold of Mohammedanism, and how the Sons of the Prophet hated the Christian was only too well known. Yet, Akbar had pledged his word for their safety. And it was undoubtedly a brilliant opportunity ; perhaps thousands of conversions depended on their accepting this invitation. Yes, they would certainly go.

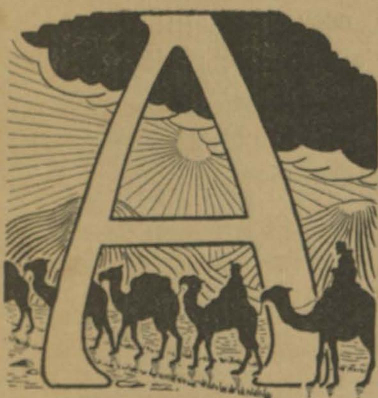
And volunteers were not wanting. But the greatest

care must be taken in choosing Fathers best fitted for an enterprise on which so much apparently depended. Thus, it was only after all had betaken themselves to prayer that the selection was made. Acquaviva by reason of his deep piety and great learning was the first choice. Father Antonio Montserrat qualified as a worthy companion. The third was Father Henriquez, a convert from Islam, whose knowledge of Persian would make him valuable as an interpreter.

THE three Fathers were enthusiastic over the adventure, and Acquaviva's chief source of joy was the prospect of shedding his blood for the Faith. In a letter, dated November 17, 1579, he wrote to his uncle, Father Claude Acquaviva, in Rome : " I am writing to ask your prayers. For we need greatly God's help, as we are being sent, ' like men appointed to death ', into the midst of Mohammedans. We go, however, filled with a joy such as I have never felt before, because there is a chance of suffering something for Christ our Lord ; and we are about to journey into far-off lands in search of souls, after the example which our Lord Himself has put before us. And if we are to shed our blood for love of Him, a thing very possible in such an expedition, then shall we be truly blessed."

On the same day that this letter was written, the three missionaries embarked at Goa, amidst the cheers of an enthusiastic throng that lined the quay. The little ship, decked out in gay colours, glided down the Rio de Mendovi on the high tide, then nosed her prow northward when she reached the open sea, and with all sails set went ploughing through the emerald waves up along the western coast.

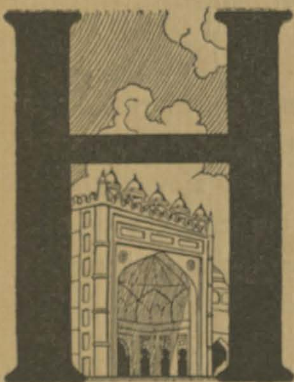
How Father Rudolph must have thrilled at the thought that he was now so truly following Xavier, who in his ceaseless travels had gone far up this same coast before him. And, though his mind no doubt was filled with the conquest of souls which he fervently anticipated, nevertheless he must also have thrilled to the beauty of the scenery. As he stood on the deck, he could follow the coast fringed with palms and smothered with tropical vegetation, the white sands of the beach glistening in the sun, and the continuous chain of purple hills tumbling down to the sea. Some distance up the coast, they passed beneath the massive stone walls of a Portuguese fort, frowning down from a high promontory. In the evening, as the moon swung up over the hills, the sea took on a phosphorescent glow, and the waves went rolling off the prow of the boat like furrows of molten silver. Then later, lulled to sleep with the ship's gentle roll, perhaps Rudolph saw in his dreams a white Raja from the West, with rubies and sapphires and emeralds sparkling in his silken turban, and lolling in a golden howdah on the back of a noble tusker, he took the salaams of underlings, and went lumbering on his way to the land of the Great Mogul.



AFTER twenty days at sea, the ship put in at Damaon, the last Portuguese outpost in the north. From here the party travelled on foot still further north to Surat, which was then a flourishing port, equivalent to present-day Bombay. It had been taken by Akbar in 1573, and served as a gateway to his kingdom on the West.

Owing to an unavoidable delay, it was not until January 15, 1580 that they set out on their long journey inland. Hundreds of miles of barren land baked by a ruthless Indian sun lay before them. For some distance they were accompanied by a merchant caravan, and later by a guard of Mogul troops which Akbar had provided. This colourful escort, the strange

peoples along the way, and the perils of the road must have prevented the six weeks of slow and ceaseless travel from becoming too tedious. Besides, the Fathers rode in state as guests of the Emperor, and at every town where they halted they met with royal receptions which he had prearranged. Akbar was certainly keeping his word that the Fathers would be handsomely cared for. And he climaxed all this royal solicitude with a grand flourish, when towards the end of the journey a glittering escort, mounted on horses, elephants and camels, rode out to meet the new arrivals. And now through the shimmering haze across the plains the domes and cupolas and minarets of Akbar's Victory City came into view.



HOW the Fathers must have gazed in wide-eyed amazement at this imposing citadel that rose up before them ! An astounding architectural achievement, built in red sandstone on an eminence above the surrounding plains, and closed in by nine miles of massive stone walls, this impregnable stronghold still stands to-day, the most impressive memorial of Akbar's greatness.

And, though its spacious halls and pavilions and paved courtyards are now deserted, the visitor still finds the charms of this old city well-nigh inexhaustible. There is for instance the " Hall of Private Audience ", with its marvellously sculptured pillar, on top of which Akbar sat when giving audiences for fear of assassination. Next to this hall is the " Hide and Seek House ", where the Emperor relaxed from the trying

affairs of state by playing games with the ladies of the harem. Then comes a group of buildings, called the "Private Palaces". Here the visitor is shown a room, once beautifully frescoed, which is said to have been the royal bed-chamber. And adjoining it is another room containing a dais, which was occupied by Akbar's Hindu astrologer. From the bed-chamber branch off in various directions, and closed in by red sandstone screens, passage ways by means of which the Emperor was able to reach all the important buildings of the city without being seen. Perhaps the most impressive building of the group is the one called the "Panch Mahal", or Palace of Five Storeys. It is an ingenious arrangement of five pavilion-like structures resting on ornate pillars, each smaller than the one below, so as to give the whole a tapering effect of airy gracefulness. It commands a fine view of the entire city, and it was here that the Emperor was wont to retire at sundown, to enjoy the cool evening breeze.

Another feature of special interest is the waterworks. This is a clever engineering feat, consisting of a system of tanks and Persian water-wheels which brought the water from a neighbouring lake, lifted it up from one level to another and finally into a large reservoir, whence the supply was distributed, by little stone channels along the walls of the buildings, to the numerous baths, fountains, and flower gardens.

Then there is the "Hiran Tower", named after Akbar's favourite elephant, and built over its remains. It is a curious structure, eighty feet high, partly octagonal, partly circular, and crowned by a dome-shaped

capital. The outer surface bristles with odd spike-like proiections of stone, said to be imitation elephant tusks. From the top of this tower the Emperor watched the elephant fights in the pits below.

One of the first things to strike Rudolph and his companions, as they approached the citadel, must have been a lofty ornamental gateway that pierces the city wall on the south. It is called the "Gateway of Victory". Built of sandstone, it rises in stately beauty to a height of 176 feet, adorned with marble inlay work, and crowned with numerous cupolas and domes. It is the highest and most elaborate in this land of beautiful gateways.

WONDROUS tales of Akbar's Victory City had reached the Fathers in Goa long before they even dreamt that there would be any possibility of ever seeing it. It now loomed up before them, the reality far surpassing their wildest expectations. Rudolph, who had been accustomed to royalty and grandeur back in Europe, had never seen anything to equal this.

Escorted into the city with great pomp, the missionaries now passed through another ornamental archway, named " The Elephant Gate ", so called because of two huge stone figures of elephants that flanked the outer portal. They then proceeded to the imperial palace, and were immediately presented to the Great Mogul.

The scene has been thus described : "The Fathers found the great conqueror seated cross-legged on a throne covered with a velvet cushion fringed with gold, upon a raised platform. He was almost as fair as southern Europeans, and was then about thirty-seven. Upon his head he wore a turban of Hindu form, adorned with a fortune of rare gems. His dress consisted of a robe of cloth of gold, embroidered with leaves and flowers, and a great brooch was on his breast. Instead of Moslem trousers, he wore a Hindu "dhoti", of the finest and most delicate silk, falling to his heels, and there gathered in by bangles covered with pearls. His shoes, of strange fashion, were an invention of his own. At his side was a scimitar, and around him were pages with bows and arrows, and other arms, ready to be offered to him if he desired them."



THE Emperor, we are told, was so delighted with the missionaries, that he engaged them in conversation until the early hours of the following morning. How Acquaviva's hopes must have soared at finding the Great Mogul so well disposed towards them. He *must* win this soul, which would surely be the " open sesame " to the conversion of thousands of others of his vast realm.

Akbar certainly continued to give him every encouragement. A few days later, the Fathers were summoned for another audience. On this occasion they presented the Emperor with a splendid edition of the Old and New Testaments in seven handsomely bound volumes. He was greatly pleased, and received the gift with profound respect, kissing each volume and

touching them to his forehead as a mark of special reverence. He then led Father Acquaviva into his private quarters and showed him a costly casket of fine workmanship in which they were to be kept.

Then Akbar gave a further manifestation of his high esteem for the Fathers, by issuing orders to have their lodgings transferred from the guest quarters to an apartment in the imperial palace. And later he himself came to see that they had every comfort. The Fathers showed him the little chapel which they had arranged, and he immediately became absorbed in the picture of the Madonna of Santa Maria Maggiore which hung over the altar. He contemplated it in silence, honoured it with acts of reverence, and then kept the Fathers for a long time in conversation about our Lady. So impressed was he by this picture, that a few days later he brought his three sons and a number of the Mullahs to see it.



ALL this display of hospitality on the part of the Emperor and his keen interest in things Christian served to strengthen Acquaviva's assurance that he would win him to the Faith.

The Fathers were now invited to take part in the religious discussions held on Saturday evenings in the Diwan-I-Khas, or Hall of Private audience. Akbar himself presided at these meetings, seated on the richly carved capital of the pillar which stood in the center of the hall.

At the next meeting Father Rudolph crossed swords with the Mullahs. The Subject for debate was whether the Bible or the Koran contained the word of God. Acquaviva's brilliant mind and his years of scholastic training soon gave him an easy mastery over his adversaries. He parried their attacks, returned thrust for

thrust, and so clearly and crushingly refuted their shallow arguments, that the Mullahs were soon reduced to muddled wrangling, and had recourse to angry invective. Then the issue became : Christ or Mohammed. And Acquaviva, eager to deal his opponents an overwhelming defeat, because of the impetus he hoped it would give to Akbar's conversion, boldly took the attack. Fearlessly and defiantly he portrayed the beauty of Christ's character, the sanctity of His life, and the sublimity of His doctrine, as contrasted with the immorality and idolatry of Mohammed's early life, and the polygamy and sensuality allowed for in his teachings.

It was a glowing victory for Acquaviva and the Emperor did not try to conceal his delight. He was charmed with Rudolph's clear and forceful logic, his intrepid yet courteous manner in dealing with the Mullahs. Apparently the truth and beauty of Christianity had come home to the Great Mogul with the force of revelation. He congratulated Father Rudolph, and requested him to give a further explanation of the Trinity and the Incarnation.

BUT the Mullahs did not take their humiliating defeat quietly. They were now bent on regaining their prestige at any cost. The relative merits of the Bible and the Koran was made the topic for further discussions, and eventually the issue came to a stirring climax. Unable to meet the arguments of the Fathers, one of the incensed Mullahs now proposed that it be decided by a public ordeal.

"I shall walk into a flaming fire with the Koran in my hands," he said, "if at the same time the missionary, carrying his Bible, will do the same. And if one of us gets through it safely, this will prove the truth of his creed."

The fire was actually kindled, and the Mullah, tugging at Father Acquaviva's cassock, urged him to enter, saying : "Come, in the name of God."

It seems that Rudolph was at first inclined to accept the challenge, but soon realized that to expect a miracle in the given circumstances would be tempting God. He had already sufficiently proved the falsity of the Koran, and it would be wrong to ask God to confirm his arguments by preserving him from the flames of the fire.

However, he must show that he was not being held back by fear ; that he really was prepared to die for the Gospel. And this he did by declaring boldly before Akbar and the assembled Mullahs and courtiers that Mohammed was a false prophet, a liar and an impostor, whereas Jesus Christ was the true son of God in whom alone there is hope of salvation.

This daring declaration was of course rank blasphemy in the eyes of the infuriated Moslems, and it might easily have cost Acquaviva his life, had not Akbar intervened.

Only a few days later, however, the Emperor again approached Rudolph, urging him to accept the ordeal by fire, at the same time confiding a little scheme which he had in mind.

" I have been wanting to punish that Mullah for certain misdemeanours," he said, " but I have been prevented owing to his great influence. Therefore, accept the challenge, and I shall see to it that the Mullah enters the fire first. Then when he is dead, I shall forbid you to enter."

Rudolph, of course, refused to take part in the treacherous plot, saying that he could not be guilty of this man's death.

" It is not you," the King urged, " but I who shall

be the cause of his death. Only act as if you accepted the challenge."

"But neither can I do that," Rudolph replied with finality. "Our religion forbids all simulation. If that man is guilty of wrong-doing, have him judged and sentenced. And if you wish to test the constancy of the Christians, then have me thrown into the flames."

With this staunch reply Akbar was satisfied, and admired the missionaries all the more.

THERE were still more debates with the Mullahs in the presence of the King. And in all these discussions the Fathers never spared their Moslem adversaries. Regardless of the risks they were taking, they spoke out boldly in defense of the Faith, at the same time using strong and daring language in denouncing the religion of the Prophet. Little wonder then that they now found themselves in grave danger.

It was precisely the prospect of martyrdom, however, that gave Acquaviva his greatest joy. In a letter, dated July 18, 1580, he writes to the Father General in Rome: "At the end of this letter I must tell your Paternity the greatest joy I have here. It is that I am near martyrdom. For 'we have confessed and have

not denied ; we have confessed ' that Mohomet is not the Prophet of God, and we have not denied that Christ is the Son of God." Again : " We have declared before the King and his whole court that Mohomet is Anti-christ. So nothing stands between us and death, save the life of the King. The heathens hate us too, because we have publicly condemned the long established practice of widows throwing themselves into the funeral pyre of their husbands."

In another letter to the Rector of the College at Goa, he wrote : " That which I wished for I have been able to do, to bear witness before the kings and rulers of this world to the name of Jesus Christ, with the hope of winning thus the prize of such a death as Holy Scripture calls 'precious in the sight of the Lord'."



ONE wonders what effect those religious discussions were having on the King personally. For, in the same letter just quoted, Acquaviva remarks that : "Ours is a thoroughly uncertain outlook, as far as the King's conversion goes."

By his continued courtesy, generosity and kindness, and from the way he always defended the Fathers , even rejoicing in their victories over the Mullahs, it is clear that Akbar held them in very high esteem. This, however, was scarcely what the Fathers were seeking ; they were more concerned with knowing what influence they were having on his religious convictions.

Akbar had surely given sufficient evidence of good dispositions towards Christianity for the Fathers to entertain high hopes of winning him to the Faith.

Besides permitting the Fathers' chapel in the very palace enclosure, and visiting it frequently with great reverence, of his own initiative he had expressed his willingness to construct throughout his kingdom any number of churches that the Fathers might desire. Likewise he gave them full liberty to convert and baptize any of his subjects, at the same time threatening to punish anyone who might attempt to oppose them. He even entrusted his own son, Murad, to Father Montserrat for religious instruction. And as for himself, Akbar frankly admitted to Acquaviva that he believed the Christian religion to be the best of all; he had no doubt that the life and miracles of Christ were really supernatural; and of all religions, his own, he said, was the worst.

But, as we have seen, Akbar had already ceased to be a true follower of the Prophet. And in how far he was really sincere with regard to embracing Christianity is a matter for speculation. True, when pressed by Father Acquaviva, he declared that, should God call him to the true faith, nothing would stand in his way —not even his large harem. But a step so important, and of such far-reaching consequences, he said, would require much time and deliberation.

One of his biographers maintains that during the religious discussions Akbar's mind was solely bent upon ascertaining the truth. It is difficult to reconcile this, however, with later developments, and more credible that the King was all along only toying with the truth.

But in any case, Father Rudolph was as yet not convinced of this, although the missionaries had now spent almost two years at the Mogul court.

ABOUT this time, towards the end of 1581, the Great Mogul suddenly found it necessary to abandon the luxury of his court, and take to the battle field. Insurrections had broken out in various quarters of his empire, the chief threat coming from his own brother, Muhammad Hakim Mirsa, who was invading his kingdom two hundred miles north of the Palace City. Father Acquaviva wished to accompany the Emperor on this campaign against his rebel brother, but Akbar feared that his presence in camp would be a source of irritation to the already hostile Mohammedans. Father Montserrat, however, was permitted to go in the capacity of tutor to Prince Murad. And as Father Henriquez had been called back to Goa earlier in the year, Father Acquaviva was left without any companion at the court,

which was now all but deserted. During this period Father Rudolph's zeal for souls no doubt urged him to go out into the streets of the villages and proclaim the Gospel. But prudence forbade such a course of action, for he writes to the Father General : "We are despised by everyone. They threaten us with their swords. We are the reproach and scorn of the mob. They gather round us and look at us as if we were monsters. They call us black devils and Kafirs, that is, men without God or religion. Then they pelt us with filth. But all this seems as nothing, for 'we have not yet resisted unto blood'."

So, during these days of isolation, Acquaviva had to be content with a diligent study of Persian and the Koran, in both of which he became remarkably proficient. Moreover, the saintly missionary welcomed his solitude as an opportunity to draw yet nearer to Christ. His fastings now became more rigorous, and his vigils more numerous and prolonged; he often spent the whole night in meditation. Likewise his scourgings became more frequent and severe.

These he took pains to conceal, but on one occasion he was discovered by Akbar's young son, Prince Salim. Hearing the dull sound of repeated blows, the Prince, thinking that someone was being attacked, went to investigate. He came to the sleeping quarters of Father Acquaviva. And, on entering the room, he beheld with amazement fresh blood on the floor.

This incident made such a lasting impression on the young Prince, that, years later as Emperor, he would relate the story to the assembled courtiers and exclaim : "What a man ! What a man he was !"

THERE was much more that would have won still greater admiration from Prince Salim, had he known it. For, during these days of solitude at the court, Father Acquaviva was preparing for the martyrdom which seemed ever close at hand.

Fortunately, his spiritual director in Goa left in writing a record which gives a fair insight into Rudolph's interior life at this time.

The document reads : " Father Rudolph, for the three years spent at the court of the Mogul, and especially the last when he was alone, led the life of a hermit. His food was very scanty and badly cooked, and he fasted some days every week. The hairshirt, disciplines, and every sort of unusual method of penance and self-inflicted suffering were ever employed

by him. His study was chiefly the Holy Scriptures. The rest of his time, for he never left the house save when summoned to court, he devoted partly to perfecting himself in Persian, and partly to prayer. He used always to spend the greater portion of the day united with God ; but when he was living alone, this union was almost uninterrupted. On most nights he devoted the hours from sunset to sunrise to prayer, so that when he returned to Goa, he did not seem to have come back from a court or from a heathen and Mohammedan land; but from the noviceship or from a retreat. The weariness, the illness, the perils of death, the sufferings he bore were excessive, and served as a preparation for martyrdom. Still, if his trials were great, so too were the consolations which God gave to his soul, and in fact far greater, especially in this year of his solitude."



AKBAR'S doubtful sincerity had already caused Father Acquaviva's superiors to consider recalling him from the Mogul court. But in April 1582, while Akbar was still away with the army, Rudolph wrote to Father General in Rome, giving reasons why he should remain :

"First, because the King gives greater hopes than ever for the future, is anxious to learn the Law of God, and treats us more kindly than before, and, though there are difficulties, still he proves his affection for us ; it is impossible to express how great are his love and familiarity towards us.

"Secondly, we hope that the King's second son, called Pahari, who is learning Portuguese and our holy faith, and who shows great affection towards us, will

really profit by it, because he is naturally of a good disposition and has great talent.

"Thirdly, because we have found a new race of Pagans, called Bottan, who live beyond Lahore, across the Indus, and they are very well inclined and devoted to good works...

"Fourthly, because there is here an old man, the father of the King's secretary, in whom he confides in matters of law. He is very devoted to the contemplation of Divine things, and so seems disposed to receive the light of faith...

"Fifthly, because where we are is the true and real India. And this kingdom is like the stair whence you can go to every other portion of it, and to many parts of Asia..."

In spite of all these excellent reasons,
however, Acquaviva was soon
to change his mind about
staying on at Akbar's
court.



THE conversion of the Great Mogul had been the burning desire of Father Rudolph's heart. For this he had incessantly prayed ; for this he had so frequently fasted and offered his holy Sacrifice of the Mass. But it was all of no avail, for the following November, when the King returned victorious from the campaign against his brother, it soon became clear that he had not the slightest intention of becoming a Christian.

On the contrary, flushed with his recent victory, the one thought that now occupied Akbar's mind was that scheme for establishing a new religion, of which he was to be the head and infallible guide. And for the common people at least, he even entertained the idea of setting himself up as some sort of god.

Surely the mind of the Great Mogal presents a

strange psychological study. How is one to reconcile this fatuous dream of his with all his apparently good dispositions towards Christianity? Acquaviva himself wrote in one of his letters: "I really cannot quite understand him, for he treats us with great familiarity and does not cease inquiring about things regarding the faith. . . And on the other hand, it seems that he is embarrassed by other things, although he confessed to me one day that he was so bewildered as not to know how to determine the truth."

Akbar did no doubt have great difficulties. However, as someone has written of him, "he was greatly attracted by Christianity, but he had the bad habit of asking another question whilst the first was being answered." And in spite of the fact that on one occasion he declared that his harem would not stand in the way if God called him to the true faith, nevertheless it has been suggested that this really did constitute his chief difficulty. In any case, Father Acquaviva now realized fully and with bitter disappointment that the conversion of the Great Mogul was a lost cause. And he was now quite willing to return to Goa.

RUDOLPH soon discovered, however, that to take his departure was going to be no easy step. For, when he first intimated that to stay on any longer would only be a waste of time, the King showed that he was very loath to leave him go.

But, since Akbar manifestly had no intention of becoming a Christian, Rudolph enquired through his chief minister why he wanted him to remain. The answer came back that " it pleased the emperor to have around him learned men of every race, and especially one whose teaching he so much admired."

About the King's admiration for his teaching, however, Father Acquaviva no longer had any illusions. So now, as a pretext to leave, it was suggested that he should accompany the embassy to Europe which Akbar was then contemplating. But to this the King replied

that he would sooner abandon the idea of an embassy than part with one whom he so loved and from whom he had learned so much.

Even the proposal to send other Fathers from Goa to take the place of Father Acquaviva did not satisfy the King. And it must be admitted that all this display of endearment was not a mere sham on the part of the Great Mogul. Though Rudolph had failed to win him to the faith, he nevertheless had won his sincere affection.

In this embarrassing perplexity, Rudolph left the matter in the hands of his Provincial at Goa. He wrote : "As you do not wish me to leave at the King's displeasure, and as I cannot do this without grievously offending him, I feel there is no good trying. However, Father, I do not think I am of any use here..." We detect in these words the sorrow and sense of utter failure that were preying on Rudolph's heart.

Since all other attempts seemed to be futile, the Provincial now had recourse to Akbar's promise that he would not hold the missionaries against their will. And with this the King finally yielded, but on the condition that Acquaviva would return, or, in case this were impossible, that another Father would be sent to replace him.

As a parting token of his affection and esteem, Akbar presented Rudolph with gold and jewels of great value, but he kept only what was necessary to defray the expenses back to Goa. Likewise the King insisted that he should have an armed escort, for he had pledged his word for Rudolph's safety, and he feared that the

Moslems would attempt to kill him, But Rudolph's trust in God prompted him to refuse this precaution. Besides, now more than ever he was longing to lay down his life for Christ.

So Father Acquaviva bade farewell to the Great Mogul, and took his leave of Fatepur Sikri with a heavy heart. He had come to the Mogul court with two burning desires : to convert the King, and to shed his blood for the Faith. He was now leaving with neither of these desires attained, though both had often seemed so near. But, little as Father Rudolph now dreamed of it, that prophecy of Benedict Nursino was soon to be fulfilled. The coveted prize of martyrdom which had been denied him where he most expected it, was now just within his grasp.

FATHER Acquaviva arrived in Goa in May, 1583, and was very soon appointed Superior of the Mission of Salsette.

Salsette is the southern district of the Portuguese territory of Goa, embracing about one hundred square miles and extending along the western coast of India some two hundred and fifty miles below present-day Bombay. When Acquaviva was placed in charge, the district had a population of about 80,000 inhabitants, scattered among some sixty villages. They were practically all pagans, and bitterly hostile to Christianity. Some years before, they had actually stoned an Indian catechist to death.

This hatred for Christianity had its source for the most part in various uncomprimising measures of the Portuguese Government against cruel and immoral

practices of the Hindus. Thus, in 1567, the Viceroy of Goa had forbidden 'satee', or the burning of widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands. And later, many Hindu temples and idols were demolished when the Brahmans were found guilty of ill-treating the newly converted Christians. The Brahmans retaliated by destroying all the Catholic churches in the villages.

This then was the situation when Father Acquaviva took up his headquarters in a village near the Portuguese fort at Rachol. He found himself assigned to a post bristling with danger. The prophecy of Benedict Nursino is now at last to be verified in full.

IT was the 25th of July, 1583. Father Acquaviva set out from Rachol with four Jesuit companions, three of whom were priests, the other a lay Brother. A good number of Indian Christians likewise accompanied them. Their intention was to erect a cross in the village of Cuncolim, and also to visit some other neighbouring villages in the hope of finding suitable ground where chapels might be built.

Now Cuncolim was a veritable stronghold of paganism, and perhaps of all the villages the most hostile to Christianity. It boasted a temple to the goddess Mamai, and was also a place of pilgrimage for the Hindus. Hence, when the Brahmans of Cuncolim got wind that five Jesuit missionaries and a party of Christians were coming, they quickly called into council the neighbouring villages of Velim and Assolna, and it was decided that these enemies of their religion must be put out of the way.

The missionaries, whose fate had thus been sealed, reached Cuncolim close on to noon. The village appeared peaceful enough ; surely there was nothing to arouse suspicion of the impending carnage. Some of the Christians began to prepare a lunch, while the others went with the Fathers to inspect some temple ruins close by, in the hope that this might serve as a suitable site for one of the proposed chapels. While thus engaged in measuring the ground and discussing plans, the Fathers were suddenly put on their guard by fiendish wails and weird cries. An investigation revealed a group of men and women close by with a half-naked sorcerer in their midst, twisting his body and crying out his incantations like one gone mad.

It was impossible to make out all that this fanatic was saying, but some of the Christians caught these words : " A number of heads will fall. The gods wish for the sacrifice of these five cocks." It was clear that the 'five cocks' meant the five Jesuit missionaries.

Some of the Christians immediately made for a thicket close by. But instead of finding safety there, it proved to be an ambush from a mob of infuriated pagans, who now came running to attack the Fathers, armed with spears and swords, bows and arrows.

"I leave myself in the hands of God", said Father Acquaviva, as he beheld the assailants. And he knelt down with arms outstretched in the form of a cross.

" Where is the head Father ? " asked one of the blood-thirsty leaders.

Father Acquaviva rose to his feet to reply, but immediately an ugly gash in the thighs from a scimi-

How fitting that they should be enshrined so close to the body of Saint Francis Xavier, whom he had chosen for his special patron, and whom he had followed so closely in life.

We are told that the news of Father Acquaviva's cruel death caused great sorrow to the Great Mogul. But it wrought no change in his manner of life. He continued to toy with truth. He dabbled in Zoroastrian worship of the sun, fire, and light; allied himself to some extent with the Jain precepts of sanctity of animal life; and adopted certain practices of the Christian ritual. This, however, was the limit of Akbar's approach to Christianity; he never really came close to embracing the Faith. And thus, having long before abandoned Mohammedanism, the Great Mogul, as one biographer observes, "died as he had lived, a man whose religion nobody could name. He passed away (1605) without the benefit of the prayers of any church or sect."

Those three years, however, which Father Acquaviva spent at Akbar's court were not without fruit. They paved the way for later missions into the kingdom of the Great Mogul. And today, in those same districts of northern India which once were under Mogul sway, there are missionaries animated with the same high purpose that had fired the courageous and valiant soul of Acquaviva,—the ambition to establish there, in the decayed empire of the Great Mogul, the Kingdom of the King of kings.

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